

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PROTEST AMONG TERRORIST PRISONERS IN NORTHERN
IRELAND EXTENDED

REF: LONDON 7823

1. SUMMARY: THE PROVISIONAL IRA'S CAMPAIGN TO RESTORE SPECIAL STATUS TO ITS PRISONERS CONTINUES, AND PROTEST ACTION HAS SPREAD TO SOME LOYALISTS. SUPPORTERS OF BOTH SIDES ARE TRYING TO CATCH OUTSIDE ATTENTION. THERE IS LITTLE RESONANCE HERE, BUT CONDITIONS AT THE PRINCIPAL PRISON ARE UNPLEASANT. THE PEACE PEOPLE AND, REPORTEDLY, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL HAVE TAKEN AN INTEREST. END SUMMARY.

2. LOYALISTS JOIN PROTEST: AS NOTED IN REFTEL, MEMBERS OF LOYALIST AS WELL AS REPUBLICAN PARAMILITARY ORGANIZATIONS CONVICTED OF TERRORIST CRIMES AFTER MARCH 1976 ARE TREATED AS COMMON CRIMINALS. IN CONTRAST TO THE PROVISIONAL IRA PRISONERS, LOYALISTS ACCEPTED THE LOSS OF "SPECIAL STATUS". BUT AS THE PROVOS STEPPED UP THEIR PROTEST CAMPAIGN IN MARCH, GRUMBLING BEGAN AMONG LOYALIST PRISONERS, AND RECENTLY A GOOD NUMBER OF THEM HAVE BEGUN TO PROTEST. THEY ARE PRINCIPALLY THOSE HELD PENDING

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CHARGES OR TRIAL AT CRUMLIN ROAD PRISON IN DOWNTOWN BELFAST, AND AT THE MAZE PRISON 10 MILES OUTSIDE. THEIR IMMEDIATE DEMAND IS SEGREGATION FROM REPUBLICAN PRISONERS: THERE IS DE FACTO SEGREGATION BY CELLS, BUT THE LOYALISTS SAY THEY ARE ENDANGERED BY REPUBLICANS WHEN THEY MEET ON COMMON GROUND, PARTICULARLY IN MESSHALLS. THEIR PROTEST ACTION IS VARIED AND SPORADIC -- REFUSING TO LEAVE CELLS TO EAT, TO WASH OR SHAVE, OR TO CLEAN

UP CELLS.

3. REV. IAN PAISLEY HAS TAKEN THE LOYALISTS CASE TO THE GOVERNMENT, WITH THE PARTICULAR ACCUSATION THAT REPUBLICAN PROTESTORS ARE TREATED BETTER, MINISTER OF STATE DON CONCANNON MAY 23 TOLD PAISLEY THAT THE LOYALISTS WERE TRYING TO OBTAIN SEGREGATION, BUT THEIR EVENTUAL AIM WAS THE RESTORATION OF SPECIAL STATUS (IN FACT, TWO FULL PAGE ADS IN LOCAL PAPERS HAVE ASKED FOR SPECIAL STATUS). CONCANNON SAID STRONGLY THAT SPECIAL STATUS WAS OUT. HE ALSO EMPHASIZED THAT PRISONERS HAD BEEN PUNISHED NOT FOR THEIR REFUSAL TO TAKE SOME MEALS, AS ALLEGED, BUT FOR SUCH INFRACTIONS OF PRISON RULES AS "PUTTING URINE UNDER THE DOORS OF THEIR CELLS" AND BURNING THEIR BEDDING.

4. PROVISIONAL IRA: REPUBLICANS IN THE MAZE PRISON CONTINUE THEIR PROTEST CAMPAIGN, AND OUTSIDERS CONTINUE THEIR ATTEMPT TO GAIN SUPPORT: AGITATION ON THE POLICE'S ALLEGED USE OF TORTURE, REPORTS OF US CONGRESSIONAL CONCERN, AN INTERNATIONAL "INQUIRY" IN DUBLIN, DEMONSTRATIONS IN NI, ETC. MOST OF THIS ACTION HAS INVOLVED ONLY THE CONVERTED, BUT THE PEACE PEOPLE HAVE GIVEN SOME SUPPORT, AND AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORTEDLY IS CONCERNED. THE FORMER SUGGESTED AN "EMERGENCY STATUS" FOR THE PRISONERS, WITH THE RATIONALE THAT THEY WERE CONVICTED UNDER EMERGENCY LEGISLATION, AND THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER TO LEAD THEM

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TOWARD RECONCILIATION THAN PERMANENT EMBITTERMENT. AND A LOCAL PRIEST ENGAGED IN HUMAN RIGHTS MATTERS, FATHER DENIS FAUL, TOLD THE PRESS THAT AMNESTY HAD WRITTEN SECRETARY OF STATE MASON URGING A VISIT OF INVESTIGATION INTO THE PRISONS BY AN IMPARTIAL INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION.

5. ON MAY 30 A GUNMAN TRIED TO FORCE ENTRANCE INTO A PRISON GUARD'S HOME. THE WIFE GRAPPLED WITH HIM AND WAS SHOT IN THE SIDE.

6. COMMENT: LOYALIST AND REPUBLICAN PRISONERS DISLIKE EACH OTHER, BUT THEIR PROTESTS FEED ON EACH OTHER. SIGNIFICANTLY, PRISONERS WHO STILL ENJOY SPECIAL STATUS HAVE NOT JOINED IN. CONGEN OFFICERS MAY 31 VISITED AN AMERICAN CITIZEN HELD IN THE MAZE PENDING TRIAL. THE PROTESTS SEEMED TO BE AFFECTING JAILORS AND JAILED ALIKE AND THE ATMOSPHERE WAS TENSE. THERE IS NO SIGN OF THE AUTHORITIES OR THE PRISONERS BACKING DOWN, BUT THE LATTER'S CAMPAIGN HAS LITTLE RESONANCE LOCALLY. THE ATTEMPT AGAINST THE PRISON OFFICER AND THE REPORTED AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVE, HOWEVER, COULD BE IMPORTANT.

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